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## A STUDY OF CONTRIBUTION OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF CHALUKYAS IN BADAMI

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**Abstract:** Badami, along with Aihole, Pattadakal and some other sites in and around the valley of the River Malaprabha in Bagalkot District of Karnataka, contain some of the earliest temples built in stone of southern India, beginning with the constructions of the Early Chalukyan dynasty, which ruled from Badami (ancient Vatapi) during the 6th to 8th centuries CE. However, the history of construction of monuments in stone go back much farther in time, as evidenced by the large number of megalithic monuments that are distributed at several sites in the Malaprabha Valley. In continuation of our earlier work which argues that the Chalukyas and their successors were continuing the tradition of commemoration exemplified by the megaliths into later monumental architecture – ranging from temples to miniature shrines to other forms of commemoration, this paper examines the immediate landscape around the Bhutnath Temple at Badami and interpret it as a memorial landscape with various forms of commemorative structures.

**Keywords:** Badami, Badami Chalukyas, Megaliths, Early Temple Architecture, Bhutnath Temple, Boulder Memorials, Commemorative Traditions

### Introduction

The sites of Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal, as well as a host of smaller sites like Naganathana Kolla, Mahakuta, Hale Mahakuta and Siddhanakolla, near the banks of River Malaprabha, straddling Badami and Hundgund Taluks of the Bagalkot District of Karnataka, are best known for early rock-cut as well as structural monuments, mostly temples. Badami, known in ancient times as Vatapi, was the capital of the Early Chalukyan dynasty, which controlled a large part of southern India during the sixth to eighth centuries CE. The landscape is dominated by chains of low sandstone hills with plateau tops which enclose the Malaprabha River for a distance of nearly 25km, forming a valley not much more than 8km at its widest. This valley, (henceforth “the Malaprabha Valley”), is aligned approximately southwest to northeast. Aihole is situated at the north-eastern exit of the river from the valley, Pattadakal roughly at the centre where the river makes a prominent loop towards the north, and Badami lies a few kilometres north of the south-eastern part of the valley, where the river enters it. There is a considerable concentration of temples at Badami, Aihole and Pattadakal, the oldest of these dated from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, to the period of Early Chalukyan rule. However, as mentioned earlier, these sites are by no means the only places one finds the handiwork of the Early Chalukyan architects – virtually every fold and cleft in the chain of hills bear some evidence of their chisels, with sites like Naganatha Kolla, Mahakuta and Hale Mahakuta near Badami, Huligyemanna Kolla near Pattadakal and Siddhana Kolla near Aihole all being sites of relevance to the study of early temple architecture in this region.

However, the history of human occupation of this region goes much farther back in time, even to the Palaeolithic, with stone tools and the painted rock shelters at Sidilephadi and rock paintings at Ranganatha Gudda near Badami, among other evidence pointing to human activity in early times (Padigar, 2016). There are a lot of megalithic sites, too, in the region – the megaliths of Meguti Hill being the most well-known, though other sites at Bachinnagudda and Akkaragal, near Pattadakal and Gajendragad, Kodekal etc. are also known (Sundara, 1975), with one extensive megalithic site at Kyaddigere near Meguti Hill having been destroyed in 2008 (Menon, 2012).

### The Memorial Landscapes of the Malaprabha Valley

The entire landscape along the Malaprabha Valley bears signs of a commemorative tradition that harks back to the Iron Age or even earlier. The megaliths of Meguti Hill at Aihole, in close proximity to the Meguti Jain Temple, and the rock-cut Jaina Cave, are well-known (Kadambi 2011; Menon, 2012; Morrison, 2009; Sundara, 1975). The Meguti hilltop is also strewn with rubble and large stone blocks, presumably packing from the collapsed dolmens as well as raw material for megalith-building.

Apart from the megaliths of Meguti Hill, there are other megaliths in Aihole, too, at Kyaddigere, east of Meguti Hill (now destroyed), and on the Ramalingeshwara hilltop, to the south-west of Meguti Hill, proximal to the Ramalingeshwara as well as the Galaganatha Temple complexes. Menon (2015) presents evidence that the selection of an existing megalithic site for locating the Galaganatha Temple complex by the Early Chalukyans might have been deliberate and that several, if not all, of the shrines in the complex might be carrying forward the commemorative tradition of the megaliths, in later times.



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Apart from Aihole, megalithic complexes exist near Siddhanakolla (Padigar 2004), close to Aihole, as well as Bachinnagudda and Akkaragal, both near Pattadakal, Gajendragad, near Badami, and Kodekal (Sundara, 1975). I have observed a large number of stone circle megaliths, hitherto unreported, to the west of the Early Chalukyan sandstone quarries at Motara Maradi, in the hills north of Pattadakal (Singh, 2009). All this evidence makes a strong case for the existence of an established tradition of commemoration in the Valley. This tradition of commemoration seems to have persisted into later times as well. The existence of memorial temples at Huligyemmanna Kolla, near Pattadakal has been well-established (Ramesh, 1984; Menon, 2015). Thus, the landscape of the Malaprabha Valley, which was dominated by megalithic monuments that were sepulchral or memorial in nature, saw the erection of other forms of commemorative structures in Early Chalukyan times and even later periods.

### The Bhutnath Temple Complex and Panchalinganaphadi

The Bhutnath Temple complex at Badami is a collection of shrines situated spectacularly on a platform projecting into the Agastya Teertha tank, on its north-eastern bank (Figure 1a and 1b). The nucleus of the group of assorted structures is a west-facing Early Chalukyan construction, consisting of a garbha griha, antarala, a closed mandapa and a small porch, and this has been enlarged by adding a larger, open porch in later episodes of construction (Michell, 2014). This main temple has several shrines of later construction abutting it (Figure 2), as well as a few independent shrines built nearby. The main Temple is dedicated to Shiva, referred to as Bhuteshwara in an inscription. Two of the shrines abutting the Bhutnath Temple on its northern wall (shown in Figure 2) have interesting images sculpted on their rear walls. One of these, a west-facing shrine with a phansana tower, and a small porch, has a depiction of a Shiva linga with Nandi, worshipped by a male figure and possibly his spouse, incised into one of the blocks of the rear wall of the shrine, in a manner reminiscent of depictions on hero stones (Figure 3). There is no icon remaining in the shrine. In the adjacent shrine, which is north-facing, a large stone block comprising the rear wall and in the center of it, has an image of Vishnu, four-armed and standing, with a worshipper at his feet, carved into it (Figure 4). There is a pitha inserted at the base of the image, possibly indicating that this is meant to be the principal image in the shrine. As one proceeds beyond the Bhutnath group of temples, to the south of the complex, one encounters a large boulder, locally known as Panchalinganaphadi (Figure 5), on the eastern bank of Agastya Teertha. This boulder is conspicuous due to two small temples situated dramatically on top of it. Panchalinganaphadi also has a large image of Sheshashayi Vishnu carved towards its base on the south-eastern side, around which a small shrine has been built against the rock. Another small excavation near the base faces cardinal east and is believed to receive the rays of the morning Sun every day. Carved on the north-eastern face of the boulder and the north-eastern face of a cleft in the east, at varying heights, are a number of relief carvings, of mini-shrines and icons (Figure 6). The mini-shrines enshrine lingas, some with Nandis in attendance and others without, while the other depictions have an image of Vishnu in standing position within a niche (Figure 7). A couple of unfinished mini shrines can be discerned blocked out on the north-eastern face of the cleft, too. There is also a large panel of the Hindu Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, flanked by Ganesha and Bhuvараha on one side and Mahishasuramardini Durga and Narasimha on the other, with one of the mini linga-shrines on the proper left of the Narasimha image, on the north-western face of the cleft (Figure 8). Beneath this panel is an elongated band of seated divinities, diminutive in comparison with the images above. This large panel of Hindu gods appears to be a later intervention than the mini-shrines since they have partly obliterated inscriptions which existed earlier on the rock surface



Figure 1a: The Bhutnath Temple complex at Badami with the boulder called Panchalinganaphadi beside it, with two shrines atop it, against the backdrop of the sandstone cliffs east of Badami.



Figure 1b: The boulder called Panchalinganaphadi, beside the Bhutnath Temple complex against the backdrop of the Agastya Teertha



**Figure 2: Two shrines, one west-facing, with a Phamsana roof, and the other flat-roofed and facing north, adjoining the main Bhutnath Temple**



**Figure 3: A Shiva linga and Nandi, with a couple in adoration, carved on the inner rear wall of the shrine with the Phamsana roof shown in Figure 2**

Soundararajan (1981), assigns a date more or less contemporaneous to the structural temples of Badami for the mini-shrines based on stylistic analysis of various components of the temple relief models, but feels compelled by the features of the relief sculptures shown in Figure 8 to advance the date to the end of the 7th century CE. The observation noted above, of earlier inscriptions being partly cut away when the panel of deities was carved can resolve this discrepancy. It is quite likely that the mini-shrines were sculpted earlier, when the inscriptions were incised, followed by the large panel of deities towards the close of the 7th century. Soundararajan (1981) also speculates that “these temple models thus would stand for practical exercises undertaken by craftsmen in the course of their erection of temples here in order to show the complete familiarity they had already achieved with the various structural elements of a temple in elevation.” Rajarajan (2012), proposes a date of the second half of the 6th century CE to these temple relief models, while contending that they were evolutionary prototypes for later structural temples. A small excavation, presumably for a very small shrine or a linga, was also noted (Figure 12). The two small temples are erected directly on the rock and are probably built of blocks excavated from the very rock they stand on (Figure 13). The larger shrine is west-facing and has a porch and a garbha griha, with a Karnataka Phamsana style shikhara over the sanctum. The shikhara of the other shrine, which consists of



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only a sanctum without a porch, has collapsed. The larger shrine has, inside the sanctum, a loose slab containing 4 lingas (Figure 14). Though this is a loose slab, given the nature of the high perch of the shrine, it is unlikely that it could have been added later. Slabs incorporating multiple lingas elsewhere in the Malaprabha Valley (Mahakuta) have been described as memorial in nature (Mohite 2012). Thus, this location seems to have the character of a place meant for erecting memorials – either rock-cut lingas or shrines of various sizes. It is worth noting that at Hemakuta Hill in Hampi, known to be a site for erecting memorial temples (Figure 15) from at least the 9<sup>th</sup> century (Wagoner, 2001), there are rock-cut lingas on the surface of the rock adjacent to some of the known memorial temples, some of them with dolmen like structures covering them and abutting the temple walls (Figure 16).

### Evidence for a Zone of Commemoration

The nature of the monuments clustered around the Bhutnath Temple suggests that the temple was quite possibly the nucleus of a zone of commemoration. The several small shrines built against the main temple or in the immediate vicinity, and especially the two shrines mentioned above with images carved in their rear wall, could be memorial shrines built for deceased persons. The two shrines on top of Panchalinganaphadi too are most likely memorial shrines, given the slab with several lingas inside the sanctum of one. The close resemblance of the structures and rock-cut lingas on top of the boulder to the memorial landscape of Hemakuta Hill at Hampi – a known memorial site, adds credence to this. In the light of this, it is proposed that the temple relief models and Vishnu figures too were memorials erected for deceased persons. They might represent a type of commemorative structure similar to the boulder memorials at Sravanabelagola, which will be discussed below.

Further evidence to bolster this hypothesis is found around the Tattukote area on the north bank of the Agastya Teertha, immediately north-west of the Bhutnath Temple. Beside the path leading up to the North Fort from the Tattukote group of temples, north-west of the Bhutnath group, is a rock face on which the well-known Kappearabhata inscription is inscribed (Figure 17). This inscription is a set of laudatory verses to an unknown hero, known only as Kappearabhata, of much interest since they are among the earliest verses in Kannada set in the tripadi metre (Settar, 2011).

Settar (2011) opines that Kappearabhata was in all probability a great hero of the Early Chalukyan times. It is likely that the inscription is a memorial to this great hero, though Settar is not sure about this. At other places on the same cliff face and on other nearby boulders are again encountered niche figures of divinities and linga-shrines similar to those on Panchalinganaphadi (Figure 18). There is one more location, right opposite the Archaeological Museum at Badami, where, on a face of a large boulder beside the Agastya Tirtha, there are two relief sculptures – of Vishnu and a Shiva linga (Figure 19).

In addition, there exist many monuments with clearly commemorative connotations from later periods in and around Badami town. Proceeding further up the path from the Kappearabhata inscription, one reaches the flat top of the North Fort, where, east of the modern dargah housing the grave of a Muslim saint, is a water body in a depression formed due to quarrying of rock (Figure 20). On the eastern edge of this water body are several padukas (carved footprints usually associated with commemoration) – on two loose blocks of stone (Figure 21) as well as carved on the rock bed (Figure 22). There are several relief sculptures on the side walls of the water body, such as images of a goddess and a Shiva linga with Nandi (Figure 23), a Shiva linga with devotee etc. The presence of these features adjoining a water body is a clear parallel of the Agastya Teertha and the structures in the Bhutnath area, and is suggestive of memorials constructed beside a water body for ritualistic purposes. Along the path leading up to the North Fort from Tattukote are seen loose sculptures of padukas, a votive figure of a devotee (Figure 24), usually kept in temples or other sacred spaces to commemorate a devotee (Sundara, personal communication, 2013), as well as a hero stone located near the Tattukote Hanuman sculpture, bolstering this view of the landscape as one of death and commemoration.

Up in the sandstone cliffs to the east of Bhutnath Temple, moving east out of Badami, is the location called Arali Teertha, where there is a natural cavern created by weathering around a spring-fed natural pool. On the side of this natural rock shelter is sculpted a row of Hindu divinities. Very close to this, to the west, is a rock shelter containing a memorial to a Jain monk (Figure 25). The floor of this rock shelter has a paduka in a square recess carved into it with a runoff for oblations, and the rear wall of the shelter, behind the paduka has a relief of a seated Jain monk with a trichhatra above and an inscription, in 16<sup>th</sup> century Kannada script, commemorating the salvation attained by a Jain ascetic called Vardhamanadeva (translation by Padigar, personal communication, 2013). All this points to the persistence of the practice of commemoration in the Malaprabha Valley, the origin of which goes back in antiquity definitely to the Iron Age or even before, and continuing up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century at least.

### Discussion

In view of all the above observations, it is cautiously hypothesised that the Agastya Teertha was a place for performing rituals for the attainment of moksha for the dead and prominent persons were commemorated variously by erecting temples or sculpting



lingas or likenesses of Vishnu according to the religious affiliation of the deceased as a Shaivite or Vaishnavite respectively. The Kappearabhata inscription appears to be a one-of-its-kind memorial of a great hero celebrated by the Early Chalukyas and commemorated by a fine poem, which is in fact repeated at least at two other locations near Badami, too (Settar, 2011).



Figure 21: Slabs with Padukas near the water body on North Fort



Figure 22: Padukas carved on the rock surface near the water body on North Fort



Figure 23: A linga and Nandi carved on the rock wall bounding the water body on North Fort

It appears possible that the landscape around the Bhutnath Temple and Panchalinganaphadi was a site for commemorative structures since Early Chalukyan times and this tradition persisted into later times as well. It is known that, in modern times, local residents of Badami performed shraaddha rituals for the dead in the Agastya Teertha near the Bhutnath Temple, until recently, when this practice was stopped by the Archaeological Survey of India. It is also felt that the name “Bhutnath” (more precisely, “Bhuteshwara” as mentioned in an inscription found inside the temple) could signify a connection with death and commemoration. The lesser shrines



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built against the Bhutnath Temple with imagery suggestive of commemoration lends credence to this hypothesis. One of the free-standing shrines to the south of the Bhutnath complex (visible to the right of frame in Figure 6) has a carving in shallow relief on the inside of the southern wall, which shows a seated devotee with some offering in his cupped hands, beside a kalasa. Interestingly, the devotee has his sacred thread looped over his right shoulder and hanging on the left, as apasavya, usually worn this way while performing post-death rituals.



**Figure 24: A loose votive image to commemorate a devotee now incorporated into rubble wall flanking the path leading from Tattukote to North Fort**



**Figure 25: The memorial to Vardhamaandeva in the cliffs near Arali Tirtha**



Figure 26: Chikkabetta, or Chandragiri, at Sravanabelagola, as seen from the larger hill called Vindhyagiri



Figure 27: An inscription on the rock surface at Sravanabelagola

Figure 28: A paduka memorial at Sravanabelagola

## Conclusion

In continuation of our earlier work examining the nature of the numerous monuments and religious landscape of the Malaprabha Valley, this paper focuses on the Bhutnath Temple complex and its environs in Badami. The Early Chalukyan temple dedicated to Shiva as Bhuteshwara forms the nucleus for a variety of structures, including smaller shrines built adjoining it, and several independent shrines in the vicinity, as well as many relief sculptures carved on the nearby boulder called Panchalinganaphadi. These structures can be seen as memorials for deceased persons, probably of varying eminence, in the period of Early Chalukyan rule in the region and later periods, taking into consideration clues from similar landscapes and structures in the Malaprabha Valley and elsewhere.

In view of the widespread occurrence of megalithic monuments at several sites in the larger context of the Valley, in some cases sharing monumental space with temples and hero stones, it is possible that the hero stones, temples of various sizes, “votive” shrines near temples and the temple relief models and images carved on boulders are but evolutionary products of the same cultural expression of commemoration of the dead, as stone-working skills evolved, along with inputs from other cultural influences.



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